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The Thinking Monad

by Latham Anderson

From time immemorial efforts to extend the domain of human knowledge have exhibited themselves under two opposite phases viz:–the empirical inductive method, which takes cognizance of phenomena, and classifies them according to the similarity or identity of their occurrences; the statement of this rule, mode or order of occurrences constituting what is termed a natural law:– secondly, that pursued by the abstract deductive thinkers, or idealists, who endeavor by speculation or by surmises, more or less plausible or ingenious, to devise some primal force or cause which will satisfactorily and completely account for the mode of occurrence of the class of phenomena in question:– or more generally to demonstrate the first cause of all things.

These two classes correspond to two distinct mental temperaments in man; the inductive to the practical, plodding work-a-day materialist, the domain of whose objective cognizance is co-extensive with that of the five senses; and his consciousness or subjective cognizance, to the inherent impulses or instances of his mind and body.

The second embodies the abstract thinkers, the ideal, creative, political, artistic minds – and therefore the higher type of mental organization.

The first are true scientists in the modern acceptation : the second, philosophers so-called. It is not claimed that any man is a perfect type of either class. We are all possessed of inductive and deductive reasoning powers to a greater or less degree. Otherwise we could not reason at all. All that is meant by the above classification is that most temperaments preponderate towards one type or the other. Even when a mind is about equipoised in this regard, it's education, association or business pursuits will generally cause it to tend strongly and habitually in one or the other of these two directions. With regard to every earnest worker or thinker, it may be safely averred that his temperament or avocation will place him clearly within one group or the other. In the pursuit of their investigations the inductive reasoners have comparatively an easy time. They deal with concrete facts, brought within the cognizance of the senses or perceptions. Little or no imaginative or creative power is required on the part of the investigator; only patient, plodding, painstaking examination of facts or phenomena as to their resemblances or differences, and their classification according to their identity or similarity. Hence it follows that, in this domain of research, it is comparatively easy to arrive at definite conclusions – to establish incontrovertible facts, and hence, furthermore, it results that most if not all of our

absolute knowledge of natural phenomena is contributed by this class of reasoners – or more properly investigators. It is not claimed that scientists are devoid of error in their statements as to natural phenomena and laws. It is familiar to us all that some statements accepted as indisputable in one generation may be disproved by the discoveries of a later date. This is partly due to the inevitable limitations and incompleteness of human knowledge and also to man's propensity to generalize from insufficient data – to “jump at conclusions.” From this failing, it sometimes follows that laws are erroneously stated. Moreover the most empirical mind will sometimes attempt to reason deductively from known or supposed laws. When the latter are erroneously assumed, of course the deductions are fallacious. It is to be noted that man's arbitrariness and dogmatism in scientific discussions is usually in the ratio of the shallowness of their minds, and the superficiality of their knowledge. Humility, a sense of the narrowness of human knowledge in view of the glimpse it affords of the infinite unknown beyond, is a striking feature of the greatest and most profound thinkers, such as Solomon, Aristotle, Newton and Humboldt. But such minds are constantly reaching out into this unknown infinity, and suggesting new lines of investigation, and to this end, making tentative calculations. In this category are attempts at determining the density and masses of the planets, the distance to the nearest fixed stars, the degrees of heat of the sun's photosphere, the climate of Mars, the laws governing the action of electrical and heat forces etc. it is probable that the varying distance of the earth from the sun is now determined with a high degree of accuracy but this has only been attained by a series of approximations through hundreds of years. How unjust it would be to sneer at Newton because in his computations of celestial distances he is not as accurate as those corrected by observations accumulated during the past two hundred years.

But deductive speculation is by no means confined to the idealists. It must be acknowledged that many eminent scientists are prone at times to indulge in theories; if only for their diversion, and often for the amusement if not for the edification of their readers; for we must have a theory to account for every natural phenomenon, if for no other reason than that it facilitates discussion and aids in the teaching of the science. But, as a rule, especially of late, these theories are not stated as dogmatically as formerly. For example, the molecular theory would now be stated somewhat as follows:–

“we assume that our sensations do not deceive us as to the existence of matter. We cannot prove it logically, for some of the most astute reasoners claim that only mental impressions exist – all else being ‘the baseless fabric of a dream’, but we think it's safer and simpler to trust our senses and are therefore by preference materialists.

“Assuming that matter exists, the present accepted molecular theory explains known physical phenomena more completely and satisfactorily than any other system heretofore proposed. Hence we accept this theory on probation

until a better one is suggested."

To return to the philosophers, who call Theory Science, and spell it with a big S. They are confronted by an awe-inspiring task. The facts or phenomena with which they deal are few in number as compared with those of the physical world. The difficulty of the task is further enhanced by the vagueness of our knowledge concerning most of the phenomena which constitute the premises in our arguments. So incomplete in our knowledge of the facts that leading philosophers disagree among themselves in their definition – nor can they agree as to which one should be assumed as the major premise of the fundamental syllogism. And finally this difficulty is increased to infinity, because at least three of the factors. Time, Space and Power which enter into the problem have infinite values. We see therefore the inherent difficulty of bringing such a limitless field within the purview of one little human mind. Let us therefore view their efforts, not in a carping hypercritical spirit but with that sympathetic interest to which all such heroic, (we had almost said hopeless) efforts are entitled. A sneering dilettante was once pointing out to Sir Joshua Reynolds the defects of a young painter's work. To whom the great master replied "Ah, but if you only knew how hard it is to do." If we would only set seriously to work to solve some of these insoluble problems, by a scientific method, we would realize the difficulty of the task; and, perhaps, our respect would be increased for the brave fellows, who are spending their lives in this trying to benefit the human race. Moreover, after such an effort, we would cease to wonder that so very little conformity of opinion has been attained among the myriads of minds engaged throughout the ages in metaphysical studies.

Europe groped her way out of the darkness of medieval Scholasticism into the luminous day of modern German metaphysical thought, until finally the great light of modern times, Leibnitz, burst forth. The following is a brief outline of a part only of his discoveries. Their complete exposition requires a volume of more than 700 pages.

The ultimate elements of the universe are individual centres of force or monads. Why they should be individual, and not manifestations of one world force he never clearly proves. "The monads" he says "are the very atoms of nature, in a word the elements of thing", but as centers of force they have neither parts, extension nor figure. They are metaphysical points or spiritual being whose very nature it is to act." Hence, Leibnitz's physical doctrines of the reality and constancy of force, at the same time that space, matter and motion are merely phenomenal.

"As the bent bow springs back of itself, so the monads naturally pass and are always passing into action without any aid at the absence of opposition." (What a sublime, simple and beautiful cosmical idea this is. The monad is bound to act, to

pass, to do something, because there is nothing in the universe to stop him (or her). For the only thing that could stop a monad from passing would be the knocking against him (or her) of some other monad or atom. But Leibnitz proves that such collisions are impossible by the following syllogism. “Nor do they, like atoms, act upon one another; the action of each excludes that of every other.”

“To the superficial reasoner the logical conclusion of these premises would seem to be that the monads would thus effectually prevent each other from passing anywhere. But not so. See how skillfully and logically this great thinker avoids this apparent dilemma. He proceeds, “the activity of each is the result of its own past state the determination of its own future.” Activity in the past and future are thus clearly provided for. There is an apparent balk in the present tense, but as will be seen further on, this is easily explained away by Leibnitz, although, in the next sentence he increases the apparent difficulty by saying “The monad has no windows by which anything may go in or out.”

Further, since all substances are of the nature of force, it follows that – “in imitation of the notion which we have of souls” – they must contain something analogous to feeling and appetite.

It is the nature of the monad to represent the many in one, and this is perception, by which external events are mirrored internally. Through their own activity the monads mirror the universe, but each in its own way and from its own point of view, that is, with a more or less perfect perception for the Cartesians were wrong in ignoring the infinite grades of perception, and identifying it with the reflex cognizance of it, which may be called apperception.” Please note in this last argument the proof of present activity viz. the mirroring of the universe – for is not mirroring and act? 2 ED “every monad is thus a microcosm, the universe in little, and according to the degree of its activity is the distinctness of its representation of the universe.” (It might be inferred from this passage that Leibnitz has borrowed the Aristotelian idea, calling the monads “entelechies” because they have a certain protection and sufficiency which makes them sources of their internal actions, and, so to speak, incorporeal automata. But there is a vast difference between the entelechies of Aristotle and the sentient monads of Leibnitz. “That the monads are not pure "entelechies" is shown by the difference between them.” There we have it. Aristotle's monads were all alike, whereas Leibnitz' monads were different.” That surely is a generic difference and entitles Leibnitz to the credit of the greatest discovery of modern times. He proceeds “The monad has both activity and passively. When the latter preponderates, the monad has little activity or clearness of perception”, (and hence is of little account in the universe.) “The soul would be a divinity had it nothing but distinct perceptions; but when it has a number of little perceptions with no means of distinction, a state similar to being stunned ensues, the “monads neu” being perpetually in their state.” (From this we see that when a

monad has too many little perceptions, its action is nullified. It can't pass and a monad in this fix had better be dead.)

Time forbids us from elaborating from these simple premises Leibnitz's principles of “identity of indiscernible” and his sublime doctrine of “pre-established harmony.”

From this harmony of self-determining percipient units he explains the whole world of nature and mind. There is nothing in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth, that cannot be lucidly explained on the basis of this simple and wonderful discovery. What more could the world ask? Alas, the history of the succeeding two hundred years has furnished a sad commentary of the egotism, willfulness, and unteachableness of the human intellect.

Suppose all of Leibnitz's contemporaries and successors had been of a more humble and teachable spirit, and had proceeded in their philosophical investigations on the basis of the grand and simple truth discovered and enunciated by him. How fast would have been the expansion of Human knowledge. But instead of following with docility in the footsteps of the great master, each new philosopher ignored the truths enunciated by Leibnitz, discarded ~~[by]~~ his true method and sought to invent a new system of his own.

His contemporary Spinoza advocated a pure pantheism. There is but one infinite, eternal substance, of which all finite substances are modes or limitations. This substance is all and in all – hence it is identical with God.

Locke, an English contemporary, studies the intellectual phenomenon subjectively and then proceeds to explain its genesis and nature from its relation to the real universe of things and its mechanical operations on the mind. it will thus be seen that Locke's system marks a transition between the objective or empirical method of the English school (Bacon and Hobbes) and the purely subjective or rational system introduced by Kant. The latter occupies himself solely with the philosophy and phenomena of thinking —the theory of Science. When once we know the laws governing cognition and reasoning, the acquiring of all objective matter results as a matter of course – to such grosser minds as are interested in material phenomena.

Fitche was of the Kant school, but he proved several serious errors in the arguments of the latter. He averred that correct philosophical reasoning must depend on and start from a single principle or premise, and this again on three axioms or principles, viz.:– The first is perfectly unconditional as to form and matter, the second is unconditional in form but not in matter, and the third is unconditional and matter and not in form.

Finally Schleiermacher, who died in 1834, [devised] the most nebulous system evolved. His fundamental argument is based upon the antithesis of the real and the ideal. i.e. of organism or sense, and intellect. These few names are selected from a host of philosophers whose name is legion. There are about as many different systems of philosophy – i.e. about as many different methods of accounting for all the phenomena of nature, among other things of bringing infinity within the grasp of the finite human intellect – as there have been strong individual thinkers.

Fitchte summed up the matter in the following pithy sentence: “According to the man so is the system of philosophy he adopts.”

The assortment of existing philosophical systems is so complete and varied that it would seem every conceivable idiosyncrasy of taste could be suited. If however the duration of human life permitted a man to wade through all these vague theories and surmises called Philosophy or Science (with a big S) and he still found himself unsuited, there is no earthly consideration preventing him from evolving from his inner consciousness a brand-new system of his own for it would have as much authority as its predecessors and would be likely to secure as much consensus of human opinion. If out of this Babel of philosophical language there has been a single system or outline of a system, which has become accepted by the World at large (as has been done in physical and mathematical science) it does not appear on the surface. We see therefore that mankind has lost by not adhering to the sublime truths enunciated by Leibnitz. It will be observed that no reference has been made to the part taken by so called Christian philosophers in these discussions. This is because they are out of place in these lists. Christian philosophy is a union of incongruous terms – a misnomer. Christianity is a religion or superstition, not a system of philosophy. From the very nature of things these refined religious or semi-religious truths, which can be acquired only through a profound knowledge of philosophy must ever be beyond the reach and ken of the unlearned horde. Hence it is that in all ages and among all races of men there has been a necessity to establish some form of religion (superstition) to control the morals of the great majority of human beings, for History shows no instance of a divorce between the morality and religion of any people on the earth. As has been truly said by a living speaker, “History proves, without an exception, that whenever a race or nation has lost its faith in its religion, or superstition – that race or nation has toppled to its fall.” The ancient philosophers all recognized this natural law and hence invariably devised some system of superstition and priestcraft for the moral control of the masses. Now the Great Nazarene Teacher came, to establish not a system of philosophy. As a class, the philosophers laughed at the teachings of himself and his disciples, “To the Jews it was a stumbling block, to the Gentiles foolishness.” Jesus the Nazarene inculcated a system of subjective empiricism. His injunction was that if his hearers wished to test the truth of his doctrines they must apply them

personally, and note whether they had the effect he predicted on the formation of character. The test must be a subjective one. His religion began in the kitchen, the work shops and in the field. At the start the great majority of Christians were Roman slaves or ignoble laborers.

Hence the term Christian Philosophy is a palpable absurdity. Therefore these so-called Christian philosophers are and should be ruled out of court in this purely philosophical discussion.

We have said the ancient philosophers gave general recognition to this all pervading religious instinct in the human family. As a rule the modern philosophers present a striking contrast to their ancient brethren in this respect, most modern ignoring this remarkable phenomenon in their discussions. This may be due to the fact that since the introduction by Kant of the subjective or so called rational method, the empirical or objective method has been abandoned, and the modern philosopher has not interested himself much in any phenomena except those that were transpiring in the mind of the thinker himself.

This brings us to one of the most impressive historical facts in the history of philosophy. This idea of a sentient monad, a metaphysical point or being of perceptions, passions, affections, reason, action, was discovered by an ancient Hindu named Buddha, thousands of years before its rediscovery by Leibnitz. At least such is the claim of some of the modern Occidental students of Buddhism. Certainly it is only by this fundamental conception that we can rationally explain and harmonize the various tenets of this religion – or more properly speaking philosophy – for it is only as a philosophical system that it is now being discussed among Western nations. Inasmuch therefore, as the idea of the thinking monad is essential to a rational interpretation of Buddha's system, it is no more than fair to give him the credit for the discovery. The following brief outline of some of these tenets is taken from the analysis by T. W. Rhys Davies.

“Scattered through space, it teaches, there are innumerable circular world[s] in set of three. All of these are exactly similar to our own, in the center of which rises in enormous mountain, called Maha Meru, which is surrounded by seven concentric circles of rock of an enormous height, and the circle enclosed by the outermost is divided into four quarter[s], or great continents, part of one of which is Jambudvipa, the earth in which we live. On the heights of Maha Meru, and above it and the rock circles, rise the twenty-four heavens, and beneath it and the earth are the eight great hells. These heavens and hells are part of the material world, subject like the rest of it to the law of cause and effect, and the beings within them are still liable to rebirth, decay and death. Between Maha Meru and the [outermost] circle of rocks, the sun, moon, and [stars] revolve through space; and it is when they pass behind the first circle of rocks that they appear to the inhabitants of Jambuvipa to set. This world, like each of the others scattered

through space, is periodically destroyed by water, fire, or wind, but the sum of the demerits of the beings (men, animals, angels, etc.) who lived within it produces each time a new world, which in its turn is fated to be destroyed. The number of these beings never varies save on those few occasions when one of them either in earth or heaven attains Nirvana; in every other case, as soon as an individual dies, another is produced under more or less material conditions, according as the sum of the former individuals demerits, minus the sum of its merits, was, at the time of its death, large or small."

"The two ideas of the utter vanity of all earthly good and the inevitable law of rebirth, decay, and death will be seen to lead naturally to the belief in Nirvana. If life be an evil, and death itself be no delivery from life, it is necessary to go further back to discover the very origin, the seed, to speak of existence; and by destroying that to put an end at last to the long train of misery in which we are compelled to go again and again through the same weary round of experiences, always ending in disappointment. This seed of existence Buddha finds in "Karma", the sum of merit and demerit, which, as each one's demerit is the greater of the two, often comes practically to much the same thing as sin or error. It for[ge]s the second link in the Buddhist chain of causation, and arises in itself from ignorance. Destroy that ignorance which brings with it such a [progeny], The links of this chain of existence, root out karma with the mistaken cleaving to life, and there will be deliverance at last, deliverance from all sorrow and all trouble in the eternal rest of Nirvana. Anything less than this would be a mockery of hope; for there is no life outside the domain of transmigration, and by the inevitable law of change that which causes existence of any kind would itself be the cause also of decay, and bring with it after a time the whole chain of evils from which the tired heart of man seeks relief. It must be understood that while Buddhism occasionally yielded so far too popular phraseology as to make use of the word soul, it denies altogether that the world is anything more than a convenient expression, or that it has any counterpart in fact. Birth is no rebirth, but new birth, transmigration of soul becomes a transfer of karma, metempsychoses gives way to metamorphoses. As one generation dies and gives way to another– the heir of the consequences of all its vices and its virtues, the exact result of pre-existing causes – so each individual in the long chain of life inherits all of good or evil that all its predecessors have done or been, and takes up the struggle towards enlightenment precisely their where they have left it. There is no thing eternal, but the law of cause and effect, and change; the kosmos itself is passing away; even karma can be destroyed; nothing is, everything becomes. And so with this organized life of ours, it contains within itself no eternal germ; it passes away like everything else, there only remains the accumulated result of all its actions. One lamp is lighted at another; the second flame differs from the first to which it owes its existence. A seed grows into a tree and produces a seed from which arises another tree differing from the first though resulting from that. And so the true Buddhist saint does not mark the purity of his self-denial of lusting after a positive

happiness which he himself is to enjoy hereafter. He himself will cease to be but his virtue will live and work out its full effect in the decrease of the sum of the misery of sentient beings.

A not unnatural confusion has arisen from the fact that the result of each man's actions is held not to be dissipated as it were into many streams, but concentrated together in the formation of one new sentient being. This link of connected between the two otherwise distinct individuals has led to expressions in Buddhist writings, which, when read by Christians, seemed to infer the existence of a soul. Phrases used of those living saints who have entered the fourth path, and have practically attained Nirvana, have also been supposed by mistake to apply to Nirvana itself. And when further, Nirvana has been described in glowing terms, as the happy seat; the excellent eternal place of bliss, where there is no more death, neither decay; the end of suffering; the home of peace; the other side of the ocean of existence; the shore of salvation; the harbor of refuge; the medicine of all evil; the transcendent formless tranquil state; The Truth; the Infinite, the Unspeakable, the Everlasting, – it has been supposed by some scholars to mean a blissful state, in which the soul (!) still exists in an everlasting trance. There can however be no longer any doubt on this point. Spence, Hardy and Bigandent find in the modern Sinhalese and Burmese books the same opinion as Alvis and Gogerly and especially Childers have found in the more ancient authorities; and though the modern books of the northern Buddhists are doubtful, Eugene Burnouf a has clearly proved that their older texts contain only the same doctrine as that held in the South. Buddhism does not acknowledge the existence of a soul as a thing distinct from the parts and powers of men which are dissolved at death, and the nirvana of Buddhism is simply Extinction.

When Malunka asked Buddha whether the existence of the world is eternal or not eternal, he made him no reply; but the reason of this was that it was considered by Buddha as an inquiry that tended to no profit. Only a Buddha can comprehend how effects are produced by Karma, or how the universe was brought into existence. This last [sentence] (quoted from Hardy) is as full of meat as an egg. It gives a clue to the cause of misconception of the true inwardness of Buddhism by the Occidental materialistic mind. The latter is accustomed to reason on the gross material facts, which mostly interest it, within the cramped rigid confines of logic.

To understand Buddhism one must be born again as a reasoner – must learn the Buddhistic system of logic. Then will he clearly understand all this novel Kosmos – the great mountain Maha Meru, the seven concentric circles of rock, – the great continents including our own Jambudvipa – the twenty-four heavens– and the eight hells, – the true explanation of the rising in the setting of the sun, moon and stars – the consecutive succession of new existences (erroneously called the

transmigration of souls – there being no soul) and finally the blessed state of Nirvana – annihilation – and the active force of Karma. Opened by this key of the sentient monad, a clear, complete simple, philosophy is revealed.

Buddha is supposed to have lived several thousand years before or several hundred after Tiberius Caesar reigned in Rome – Herod Antipas being Tetrarch of Galilee – his brother Herod Philip, Tetrarch of Ituria and Trachonitis, Lysanias Tetrarch of Abilene, and Pontius Pilate Procurator of Judea, Annas being the Jewish High Priest according to Mosaic Law, but Caiaphas having been arbitrarily placed in office by the Romans. This Pilate, by the way, lived in the Proconsular Palace (containing the Praetorium) situated near the North West angle of the plateau of Mount Zion, and about one hundred feet from the fortified wall crowning the North Brink of the Plateau and separating Zion from the Lower City. About 1100 feet East of the Praetorium was the Tyropean, a narrow gorge or canyon 300 feet deep intervening between Zionia and Moria – the Temple Plateau. Fronting the Praetorium and about 100 feet West of the brink of the Tyropean was the King's House or Agrippa's Palace occupied by the Roman High Priest Caiaphas.

But we will dispense with a further account of the environment of this man Pilote, lest these episodical details may seem somewhat irrelevant to the subject matter of this paper.

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